

New Beginnings: Grow Where You Are Planted**Sunday, June 13th, 2021 || 3rd Sunday After Pentecost || Pastor Christy Wright*****Yes, we are meeting indoors at 10 AM inside the Church! (NOTE THE NEW TIME)******For full details, please read below in the Community Announcements Section.******Prelude*******Light of Christ******Announcements*******Call to Worship (Adapted from Katherine Hawker)****One: Called to be branches in Christ's body,****All: We yearn to be connected to the vine.****One: Called to be mustard bushes offering shade to God's creatures,****All: We search for places to plant the seeds of faith.****One: Called to be growing with God in the midst of this world's painful questions,****All: We seek God's nurturing presence.****One: So let us worship, in the sun and the rain.****All: Let us worship, for God is with us. Amen.*******Opening Hymn - Trust and Obey UMH 467 (Verses 1-3)*******Offering*******Doxology No. 95 & Prayer of Dedication*******Gloria Patri No. 70******Gospel Reading - Mark 4:26-34***

Jesus said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain - first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Sermon

As I close my time with you all, we're traveling through a sermon series called "New Beginnings," which explores our past, present, and future. This week, we're looking at the present time - where we've been and where we are, and the ways in which God helps us to grow, even at times by surprise.

When I was first appointed to West Brookfield, I was appointed as a Local Licensed Pastor, as someone who was on the ordination track but still had a ways to go. I had finished seminary and been through multiple interviews with our District Committee of Ordained Ministry. And the next step was Commissioning Exams.

Early this year, I spent a great deal of time preparing for these exams - submitting upwards of thirty pages of writing, multiple reference and recommendation letters, and another interview with the District Committee of Ordained Ministry - before the big interview with the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry in February. I'm not going to lie, I was absolutely terrified. I had several folks offer to "mock" interview me for the exam, looking through my paperwork for potential theological holes and areas that weren't as strong. I took them up on the offer, but rather than feeling more prepared, I ended up bombing them. I choked on difficult questions, questions that I was super confident with as well as the questions to which I didn't have an answer. And I cried, a lot, mostly out of frustration with myself. I felt like I had gotten in my head and it was blowing up in my face. I felt like such a failure - and I hadn't even been before the Board yet.

The night before the exam, I talked with a friend who reminded me that, regardless of what happened in the exam, I was called to this work. I was making a difference. And, perhaps, I had just overprepared and was getting too worked up.

That morning dawned, and, amazingly, I breathed through it all, and later that night, I got a phone call that I had passed. I had made it. God had taken me by surprise - I have NO idea how I made it through, but I made it. I trusted God. And I trusted myself. And it worked. I just had to lean back into God's arms and let go. I had made it.

As I was reading this morning's scripture, I was reminded of the phrase, "Grow where you're planted." The smallest inkling that I might want to explore ministry had exploded in this movement toward ordination. And as I look back, I can actually track my own growth in confidence. I have no idea where it came from - no idea how it formed, not a clue as to how I've gotten to where I am. I can only credit it to God's grace. This is the mystery of God's movement in our lives; it kind of happens by itself, by surprise.

And yesterday afternoon, I was officially commissioned as a Provisional Elder. This means I will serve full-time in ministry for the next three years before working through exams, and then being ordained as an Elder in full connection with the United Methodist Church. As the Bishop prayed over me yesterday, I felt this mystery of God rush past: I have no idea how I've gotten here. But I will be present, and I will move as the Holy Spirit says move.

As I was reading up on this morning's passage, I found a beautiful illustration that I want to share with you. This is from theologian Wendy Farley: "Intimacy with Christ grows in us as certainly and as effortlessly as seeds grow. We have so little to do with Christ's nearness to us that we can just go to sleep. In fact it might be better if we did sleep through the whole thing, snug and safe, resting like babies in our mothers' arms. This trust so deep that we can sleep without anxiety is much more useful to us than fussing over the little seed: dousing it with pesticide, repotting it, clucking anxiously over the amount of sun it has. The kingdom is like this sleepy, restful trust. It is not like the frenetic busyness of works of righteousness, and it is not like the anxious attachment to particular moral or doctrinal positions, defending which we gladly expend all our energy."¹

Ultimately, our growth has more to do with God's mysterious and beautiful care than our own efforts. Our personal spirituality sometimes grows in fits and starts; maybe we'll feel stagnant with our growth, and some days it seems like we're so incredibly close to God. It doesn't seem like there's any rhyme or reason, but perhaps, as Wendy puts it, "Jesus is calling us to a very different way of being with ourselves, with one another, with the divine, by asking us to recognize that spiritual growth and intimacy with God arises as naturally as seeds growing."² This personal spirituality and divine grace is given to us asking nothing in return, but what about communal growth? Perhaps all that we have to do is stay present, and move as the Holy Spirit nudges us to move.

Over the past year, I had somehow forgotten what grew around the parsonage. When the daffodils arose at the beginning of April, I was graced with the beauty of many white and gold flowers. And I suddenly remembered that there are irises of all colors both around the front and side of the house in mid-May, many of which are still blooming their gorgeous colors. I had forgotten about them. I hadn't tended to them, or anxiously awaited their arrival. And in fact, Cosmo had run through them multiple times. And so when they bloomed, seemingly out of nowhere, I stepped back and was taken by surprise. So it is with God's love and grace - in our lives and in our community.

As we close this morning, may we remember the grace we're given: grace that doesn't depend on our own actions, but in fact just relies on Jesus' presence in our lives, a presence that will never change. May we remember to grow where we're planted, for God's plans for us may just surprise us. And may we trust in the movement of the Holy Spirit, for though we don't know where the wind will blow, we do know that we will never be without it. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: the sacrifices of those who protected and continue to protect our country, the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers. Holding in our hearts: those experiencing unemployment, those facing racial injustice and violence, for our world as we continue to combat gun violence, for our congregation as we grieve the loss of loved ones, those experiencing illness or health issues - for Al (and family as they care for him), Cindy, Dan D. (Vicki's husband), Haley, Kelly R., Richie B., those in nursing homes or extended care facilities (Betty, Claire), those caring for others (Carrie G., Crystal, Rachel), the United Methodist Church. *Note that this list will renew each month.*

¹ *Feasting on the Word*, Wendy Farley, 142.

² *Ibid.*

Closing Hymn - I Surrender All UMH 354 (Verses 1 & 3)*Benediction**

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.

Community Announcements

- **NEW Service Time.** We will begin meeting at 10 AM on Sunday mornings starting this Sunday!
- **NEW Reopening Advisory Board Update. YES, WE ARE BACK IN THE BUILDING!** We welcome all back to our building as we celebrate our grand reopening! The Board asks that you sign in when you arrive, continue to social distance, sit only in pews that are marked off, **please keep your mask on if you are not vaccinated. Masks are optional for those who are vaccinated.** As always, if you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns about in-person worship, feel free to reach out to anyone on the Reopening Advisory Board: Jane Dolan, Tom McKeon, Diane Mundell, Melissa Quilitzsch, or Pastor Christy.
- **UPDATE: Air Purifiers.** Many thanks to Ira, who recently found us an air purifier for the sanctuary. Ad Council has begun exploring options for purchasing an air purifier for the fellowship hall as well - the same one that is currently being used at the Congregational Church in town. The system we are considering costs \$400. If you would like to donate toward this cause, please send your donation to the church with "Air Purifiers" in the memo line. Thank you!
- **NEW UPDATE ON MAILINGS & DAILY DEVOTIONALS.** In order to save on postage, programs for our Sunday services will now be available on Sunday mornings for pickup. They are also available online at georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services. Mailings will no longer automatically be sent out, and our daily devotionals will return to the Upper Room resource. Please let Pastor Christy know if you would like to continue receiving mailings and/or if you need an Upper Room magazine.
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours: JUNE.** Pastor Christy's office hours have shifted to **Mondays** and **Tuesdays** from 8 AM to 4 PM and **Wednesdays** from 8 AM to 12 noon. If you have an emergency outside of office hours, please call her cell phone, leave a message, and she will get back to you as soon as possible.
- **Transition.** By now, you will have heard the news that Pastor Christy is being appointed to First United Methodist Church in Stoughton, MA, and we will be receiving Certified Lay Minister Sandy Dam and Coordinating Pastor John Lucy on July 1st, 2021! We are very excited to meet Minister Sandy and Pastor John, and we look forward to their ministry! In the meantime, please continue to be in prayer during this transition as we work out details and prepare for their arrival.
- **Prayer Chain.** As a church, we are a wonderful community of prayer. When a need arises, we send it through the prayer chain so we can all meditate together. If you would like to be a part of this prayer chain, reach out to Jane Dolan, who will put you on the list.
- **THANK YOU for your continued generous donations to the work of the church!** We are so grateful for your gifts, for they make an impact near and far. As a reminder, you can mail your offerings to PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585. Thank you!

Sonshine Phone Calls and Cards List

If you know of anyone who could be added to our Sonshine list, let Pastor Christy know.

Betty Hubbard
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Kelly Rice
98 Lake Shore Drive
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Claire Wirf
(508) 791-8131 (mornings)
838 Mill Street
Worcester, MA 01602

Richie Buzzell
16 Ragged Hill Rd.
W Brookfield, MA 1585

Daily Devotionals:

***The Upper Room Daily Devotionals official magazines are still being distributed.
If you would like a copy, please let Pastor Christy know.***